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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [MOPPS](#) [MARR](#) [EI](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR FOREIGN MINISTER DERMOT AHERN'S
MEETING WITH THE SECRETARY ON OCTOBER 3

Summary

1. (SBU) The twin political successes of restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly (May 8, 2007) and the re-election of the Fianna Fail party into power (May 24, 2007) will be the backdrop to Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern's meeting with the Secretary on October 3. The Government of Ireland has expressed its gratitude for the role the United States played in the Northern Ireland peace process for many years and appreciates our continued support as the focus in the North turns to economic growth and reconciliation. Ireland hopes to use its experience in the North to promote international conflict resolution activities; the Department of Foreign Affairs has established a Conflict Resolution Unit to that end. Darfur is of particular interest to Minister Ahern following his 2006 visit to the region. Ireland has taken an active role through the European Union in working to improve conditions in the Middle East and Kosovo, and is more inclined than some European countries to take decisive action in Burma. Irish Government concerns about the status of illegal Irish citizens in the U.S. arises perennially. The Secretary last met Foreign Minister Ahern on December 1, 2005

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in Washington. End summary.

The Domestic Political Background

2. (SBU) The May 2007 election brought Fianna Fail and Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern back to power in a coalition government for an unprecedented third five-year term. Coalition members joining Fianna Fail were the Green Party and the Progressive Democrats. While relations among the three coalition partners will probably not be quite as smooth as in the previous coalition (which comprised Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats), the new government has settled down to business as usual. In recent months the Mahon Tribunal has been investigating allegations of corruption against the Taoiseach when he was Minister of Finance in the early 1990s. However, while bruised, the Taoiseach does not appear to have suffered politically. The coalition is intact; on September 26 the Taoiseach handily survived a vote of no confidence on the issue. In terms of immediate U.S. interests, despite Green Party resistance, the new government remains committed to facilitating U.S. military transits at Shannon and Dublin airports. (1,973 flights ferried 281,000 troops through Shannon in 2006.)

Sustained Economic Success

13. (SBU) For two decades the Irish economy has been booming.

Growth has been supported by a host of factors including a well-educated work force, low taxes, a relatively open economy, and a healthy dollop of foreign direct investment -- primarily from the U.S. In fact, U.S. investment stock in Ireland stands at \$62 billion; in 2006 American investment totaled 67 percent of foreign direct investment in Ireland. Such success continued in 2006 with the Irish economy remaining a pacesetter in Europe, registering roughly five percent GDP growth and virtual full employment for the third consecutive year. Economic prosperity and the availability of jobs have attracted an estimated 300,000 (mostly Eastern European) migrants since 2004, reversing Ireland's long-standing image as a country of outward migration. Roughly one in four migrants work in construction, and a potential vulnerability for the economy is the slowdown now underway in the previously red-hot housing market. Another concern is Ireland's ability to compete with low-cost economies, such as India and China, for U.S. foreign direct investment, one of the drivers of Ireland's Celtic Tiger success. Economists caution that Ireland is also vulnerable to inflation, which is now close to 5 percent.

Bilateral Agenda Items

14. (SBU) Irish Government sources say that Foreign Minister Ahern will raise the following issues during his meeting with the Secretary.

15. (SBU) Northern Ireland. Anchored in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the 2006 St. Andrew's Agreement, the Northern Ireland Assembly (Stormont) was restored in May 2007 for the first time since October 2002, led by First Minister Ian Paisley of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein. The new Assembly has taken up the reins of local government in a

DUBLIN 00000748 002 OF 003

remarkably bipartisan fashion. The U.S. continues to work with the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly to promote collaborative North-South initiatives that will help seal the peace in the North, including a planned May 2008 investment conference in Belfast. During an August 14 meeting between the Secretary and newly appointed Irish Ambassador Michael Collins, Collins suggested a POTUS meeting with Paisley and McGuinness. Minister Ahern is likely to reiterate this suggestion during his meeting with the Secretary.

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16. (SBU) Darfur. Ireland has been deeply engaged in Africa since the 19th century missionary era, and the Irish Government has recently focused its diplomatic efforts on Darfur. In July 2006, Minister Ahern visited Irish aid workers in Darfur and pressed leaders in Khartoum to accept UN peace-keepers to complement the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). Minister Ahern is reportedly interested in a special diplomatic role for himself in a region of conflict (to be determined), and believes his 2005 experience as Special Envoy for UN Reform and as a Northern Ireland negotiator could give him credibility on Darfur. Ireland has joined the European Union's (EU) Nordic battlegroup (with Sweden, Finland, and Denmark), which is slated to begin new peacekeeping duties in Eastern Chad, adjacent to Darfur. Upwards of 200 Irish troops may be involved.

17. (SBU) The Middle East. The Irish Government and public have long-standing sympathies for the Palestinian cause, and the Taoiseach has led off discussions with high-ranking USG visitors in the past by expressing concern about perceived indiscriminate Israeli responses to Palestinian violence. Ireland agrees with the U.S. that the Abbas Government must be supported. At the same time, Ireland believes that Israel needs to enhance its dialogue with the Palestinians, shore up

Abbas's position, and encourage reconciliation among the Palestinian factions. Ireland is especially concerned about the humanitarian crisis facing Gaza. Regarding Lebanon, Ireland joined the original UNIFIL force in the 1970s and contributed 150 troops to the bolstered UNIFIL mission in 2006 in the aftermath of the Israeli-Hizbollah conflict. Ireland generally favors dialogue over sanctions and is unlikely to deviate from EU policy in the Middle East.

¶18. (SBU) Kosovo. Ireland strongly supports UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's roadmap for Kosovar independence from Serbia and favors the integration of the western Balkans into the EU, pending necessary political reforms in the region. In August, Ireland became the "Framework Nation" (the lead nation in the multinational task force) in Kosovo in a KFOR brigade that includes 270 Irish troops. Nonetheless, Ireland is nervous about forcing Kosovar independence and continues to prefer a negotiated settlement between Kosovo and Serbia.

¶19. (SBU) Burma. Ireland is very concerned about the fast-paced escalation of violence in Burma, in which Minister Ahern has taken a deep personal interest. Within the EU, Ireland falls in the spectrum of countries that feel the situation is critical and decisive action is needed. While leaning toward the imposition of sanctions, Ireland wants to be convinced that sanctions won't simply push the poor over the edge. Irish Ambassadors in China, India, and ASEAN nations are consulting closely with the leadership of those nations in an effort to establish a common, productive way forward. In discussing Burma with the Secretary, Minister Ahern will be seeking common ground with the U.S.

¶10. (SBU) Iran. Irish officials are concerned about Iran's failure to comply with UNSCRs 1737 and 1747 and are very suspicious of Iran's motives in engaging IAEA. Nonetheless, Ireland continues to prefer dialogue over sanctions and was willing to talk with Iranian envoys at a high level (at their request) prior to the IAEA General Conference on September 17-21 (though the proposed meeting never took place because the envoys did not follow through). The bottom line: The Irish Government will abide by EU consensus on how best to deal with Iran.

¶11. (SBU) Immigration. The Irish Government continues to consult with Members of Congress and Irish-American groups on behalf of Irish residing illegally in the United States, variously estimated at between 5,000 and 50,000. Minister Ahern will likely ask the Secretary if a special deal can be struck for the Irish "undocumented" residents (as the Irish refer to them). Irish Ambassador Michael Collins raised this concern with you on August 14 and met on September 21 with Consular Affairs Assistant Secretary Maura Harty, where he made a pitch for a special bilateral agreement between the

DUBLIN 00000748 003 OF 003

U.S. and Ireland that would ease the flow of people back and forth, perhaps akin to the existing E-3 visa agreement with Australia. This issue poses a domestic political problem for the Irish Government, since families throughout Ireland are unable to bring home "undocumented" family members for funerals, weddings, etc., without jeopardizing the ability of those family members to return to their U.S. homes.

¶12. (SBU) Afghanistan. Ireland supports U.S. and NATO objectives in Afghanistan. It participates in the NATO Partnership for Peace program, supplying seven troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. While the Irish Government extended the tours of duty of their contingent from four months to six in May 2007 (at the urging of Embassy Dublin), so as to better accommodate ISAF rotational schedules, Ireland is unlikely to assign additional troops to ISAF.

¶13. (SBU) International Conflict Resolution. In concert with the newly established Conflict Resolution Unit (CRU) in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Embassy Dublin is seeking ways

in which Ireland and the U.S. might collaborate in an international conflict resolution endeavor, utilizing the special Irish expertise gained in dealing with the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland. The CRU is currently developing a plan of action. Minister Ahern will mention this initiative in his address to the UN General Assembly on October 2. Ambassador Foley and Minister Ahern have discussed this concept and both are enthusiastic about future U.S.-Irish collaboration.

¶14. (SBU) Climate Change. Ireland's rapid economic growth has made it difficult for the country to meet its Kyoto Protocol commitments. Under the Protocol, Ireland pledged to reduce emissions to 13 percent above 1990 levels by 2012, but emissions now stand at 25 percent above the 1990 threshold. In this context, the Government has welcomed Embassy proposals for a cooperative approach to climate change, and we are working on bilateral initiatives focused on ocean/wave energy, methane capture, and clean coal technologies. The Green Party's entry into Ireland's coalition government has brought environmental issues, such as climate change, further into the spotlight.

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